

No. 339.

THE FIRST STEP.

AMONG the many beautiful specimens of man's skill and ingenuity to be seen in the Exhibition of 1851, was a piece of sculpture bearing the above inscription. The subject may readily be imagined.—A little child was represented in the act of making a first attempt to walk, depending upon the support which its parent only too readily and with tenderness supplied. The essay of the infant was evidently an important event in its own history, and a no less interesting moment to the delighted mother, the representation of which the artist had managed in a most truthful manner. There was the tiny limb instinct with life stretched forward to perform its natural duty; whilst eager desire mingled with fear of failure spread over the little face ready to be illumined by a burst of joy. The bending form of the fond mother displayed her willingness to give the necessary aid, and the emotions of a loving heart beamed full upon her anxious face, lit up with conscious pride. This work of art by the force of its natural simplicity alone, attracted the notice of many thousands; but every parent in a moment appreciated it and understood the silent language which it spake, well remembering the time when feelings such as were there represented by lifeless marble had filled their hearts. The subject has been chosen very often by poets, painters, and sculptors for illustration, and there are doubtless very few persons who do not feel more or less interested in their delineations of this event in natural life; but there is an event in which we should all feel deeply interested, which it does not fall within the power of art so easily to display—this may be termed the first step in *spiritual life*. My dear reader *this* step is of *so much* importance, *so high* an interest that without it we are undone for ever, not merely upon the authority of man, but declared by God himself in the holy scriptures. There we are informed that “the carnal mind is enmity against God,” and, as such, will neither perform his

commands nor believe his promises ; and it does not require much reasoning to show that in such a state it cannot be expected so to do. But there is a solemn fact connected with the above statement, which is, that while man's heart is in rebellion against God, the Divine displeasure hangs over and threatens him with destruction every moment of his life ; and that unless it receive a *complete and thorough change*, his doom is sealed to all eternity. How necessary then that you should ask for a clean heart to be created and a right spirit to be renewed within you ! You may be thoughtless upon this subject but *that is your crime* ; beyond which, there are many reasons which should urge you to be thoughtful instead, one of which is the following, "Death hath taken the first step towards your end." Life is progression ! that is, when once begun it must irretrievably go forward until the last hour and moment shall arrive, whether the space between these two important events be long or short. There are no halts or pauses in life—there is no stoppage between the cradle and the grave. This we all know ; but as if by some extraordinary infatuation, we are all more or less apt to expect that Death's next call will be upon some one else, and not upon ourselves, although he may have actually been busy in our neighbour's house, and missed our own even by the smallest imaginable space. The generality of such an opinion however does not make it safe for us to receive or adopt it as our maxim. The scriptures say, (and they say truer things than men propound,) "in the midst of life we are in death;" and how do we know but that another *step*, or at the most another *stride*, will bring the King of Terrors to our elbow ? Oh ! the unwelcome reception which he receives from unregenerate hearts !—there his sting is felt indeed. While the christian counts upon dying as beginning to live, the sinner sees nothing before him but a dark, dreary, lonely passage to the realms of endless woe. Dear reader ! if the words of our Lord were to be applied to you "this night thy soul shall be required of thee," how would it fare with you ? Pause—think ;—think not only of dying, but of dying *alone*, and remember, that the christian leans upon

Christ in *his* journey to the grave,—His rod and staff *they* comfort him. This is not the case with the sinner. Another reason why you should be thoughtful instead of careless is, that God's righteous law has taken the first step towards your *condemnation*. The law requires you to be positively faultless, and has been looking to find in you no spot, flaw, or defect; instead however of being satisfied with your righteousness and true loveliness, it has found you 'all uncleanness; with tendencies and desires to sin, fostered and nourished in your heart, and not what there really should be, love to God first, and then love to your neighbour as a matter of course. Do not resent these observations, and say that you have been honest and sober, industrious and kind, paying your way respectably, and bearing a good name in your neighbourhood, and upon these grounds plead, that God who is all mercy and pity will not punish you. Remember that when you have done all that you can, you have done no more than *your duty*. But how many things if you were seriously to think are there which have *not* been done?—never forget that there is a sin in omission as well as commission, and you would not venture to say that your conduct, *without one exception*, has been such as you could ask the searching eye of a jealous God to survey. Who would attempt to keep the whole law blameless, knowing that he who offends in *one point* is guilty of all? and who could do so when the scriptures say, "in sin did my mother conceive me?" God is a God of love most certainly; but He is a God of *justice* also. Have done then with pleading your own merits, if you have ever begun to do so, and embrace the Gospel of Christ as your only hope of salvation. There is melody in the name of Jesus, when the sin-stricken soul has been looking for nothing but condemnation from the law—This is the name which tunes his heart and heals the stroke of the wound; for gratitude must come when it is remembered that Christ hath taken *the first step towards your salvation*. If no other argument could be made to prevail with you, this astounding act of mercy should beat down all your unbelief and trample it in the dust. What would

have been the result had Christ *not* taken this first step? What an amazing sacrifice was his; and all to save rebellious men. His was love passing understanding, love which overlooked all pain, suffering, humiliation, and even an ignominious death at the hands of cruel persecutors, so that he might save a perishing, sinful world from everlasting perdition. When the stern decrees of God's law properly demanded the eternal punishment due to our sins, it was the melodious voice of Jesus which exclaimed, "save them from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom." "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God, in the volume of the book it is written of me." Christ alone could satisfy the claims of Divine justice on our account, and Christ alone was ready to do so. Say then, after all that such a satisfaction involved, "how shall you escape if you neglect *so great* salvation." Remember! there is no other name given under heaven whereby men can be saved than that of Jesus Christ the Lord. You may deceive yourself into a thousand delusions about this matter if you take counsel with your own heart, and the opinions of worldly men about you. Lay down the weapons of your rebellion from this time—aye from *this time*—now—wait not until to-morrow—give your heart in earnest to God—*now!* Come to Jesus, come as a little child,—humble, trusting, and believing; admit your weakness and his strength shall be made perfect therein; ask for wisdom and He will direct your steps; his everlasting arms shall support you and set your feet upon a rock, so that you shall not be moved, and *the first* step taken in his faith, fear, and love; shall lead to glory, honour, immortality, and everlasting life, for He hath sworn it who cannot lie. *Come now!*

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